

Abstract 646

TITLE: A Behavioral Skills Focused HIV Prevention Program for Incarcerated Women

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AIDS has become the leading cause of death among female inmates (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997). In a national survey of jail inmates collected in 1996, almost three percent of the women reported that they are HIV positive. Little is known about the specific risk behaviors of this population. In addition, there have been few experimentally controlled HIV prevention interventions with incarcerated women. The few programs that have been conducted have been primarily educational in nature, without emphasis on behavior change and promotion of self-efficacy. Incarcerated women exhibit many lifestyle behaviors that place them at high risk for contracting or transmitting HIV and other STDs. Women in jail often have multiple health and HIV risk factors. Drug and alcohol use is common, which are often associated with poor health and risky sexual behavior. Exchanging sex for drugs or other needed resources is also widespread. The Women's Health Awareness and HIV Prevention Project of Howard Brown Health Center is designed to help women identify their own risk factors for contracting or transmitting HIV and other STDs. It is implemented in Cook County jail in Chicago, Illinois. Using a six session behavioral skill training model based on social cognitive theory, we attempt to impact risk behavior. Health educators and trained peer leaders facilitate the 90-minute group sessions. Optional individual sessions with the health educator are also offered upon conclusion of the group training to provide personal answers to questions raised by the training. Project objectives include increasing behavioral skills related to HIV/AIDS harm and risk reduction; increasing self efficacy regarding overall health promotion and prevention activities with a focus on HIV; and increasing communication skills, including safer sex negotiation and problem solving in high risk situations. In addition, the philosophy of empowerment guides this project with specific objectives of increasing awareness of social support networks for help seeking through the provision of linkages to community agencies upon release.

The intervention uses a controlled pre/post test design with women in the delayed treatment group serving as the controlled group. The presentation will highlight the specific HIV prevention needs of incarcerated women. We will provide an overview of the developed curriculum with an emphasis on both its content and the philosophical rationale for inclusion. Initial results of this project will be presented and will include changes in attitudes towards HIV antibody testing, impact on self-efficacy, increased levels of perceived social support, and greater knowledge of community resources. Our conclusions include emphasizing the importance of designing HIV prevention programs that are specific and comprehensive. We will also present potential obstacles and context variables that may serve as barriers to effective interventions.

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